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ABSTRACT

The vocational supervisor has a key role in providing leadership and assistance in designing and improving curricula. The first step in accomplishing this task is to establish a definition of curriculum and its place in the educational process as it relates to the vocational education supervisor. (Curriculum is defined in this paper as an orderly arrangement of integrated subjects, activities, and experiences which students pursue for the attainment of a specific educational goal.) The next step is to become familiar with the framework for sound curriculum design and the application of that framework to a specific educational program and setting. (An eight-step framework is presented which was developed by the Ohio Department of Education's Division of Vocational Education as an instructional system design for vocational education.) Since it is virtually impossible for the supervisor to be technically competent in all instructionally program areas, it is imperative that she/he design and apply an analytical strategy for reviewing curriculum content and facilitating curricular revision and/or change. Raising appropriate questions in the appraisal process can point up the strengths and/or weaknesses that are prevalent and offer some clues as to what next steps seem apparent. (A suggested list of eight questions is provided.) Finally, to be an effective leader and achieve the desired outcomes in the curriculum process, it is extremely important that supervisors recognize the importance of teachers in the process and accord them their due respect in terms of specific day to day attitudes and behavior. (JH)

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Helping the Staff Study and Improve Curricula

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by

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Helping the Staff Study and Improve Curricula

Introduction

Instructional supervision as a function can be divided into ten fairly distinct major tasks (3, p. 13). One of these tasks includes providing the leadership and assistance in designing or redesigning that which is to be taught, by whom, when, and in what pattern. The vocational supervisor is a key actor in providing such leadership and must demonstrate those essential understandings and skills that will facilitate the students' attainment of the instructional objectives by:

> Diagnosing the curriculum (in particular, the behavioral objectives) and the teachers;
>
> Prescribing steps to remedy areas of concern with respect to the curriculum and the teachers; and
>
> Enabling changes in the curriculum to occur while at the same time enabling the teachers to acquire those new competencies they need in order for the students to succeed (1, p. 252).

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the vocational education supervisor's role in curriculum design and improvement. More specifically, attention will be directed at the following points:

1. Defining the term "curriculum" and its place in the education process as it relates to the vocational education supervisor;
2. Reviewing the basic principles of curriculum development as applied to vocational education;

3. Discussing the vocational education supervisor's role and some techniques aimed at impacting upon the curriculum process; and
4. Suggesting some implications for vocational supervisors in providing dynamic leadership in curriculum design, application and appraisal.

Curriculum--A Working Definition

Teaching is supposed to be a purposeful activity. That is, teachers intend to make something happen to their students -- to help them to learn, to grow, to become, to do. One of the main reasons, however, why teaching is so often ineffectual is that teachers have not made actually operative the objectives which they quite easily recite for any inquiring observer. (4, p. 223).

However, much of the teachers' inability to systematically organize and apply a logical approach to the teaching/learning process cannot be attributed entirely to their lack of understanding or initiative. Much of the confusion regarding a systematic approach to education stems from the education profession's lack of a concensus as to the specific characteristics of such a systems approach, and/or its inability to demonstrate the effective application of the approach if it were defined and accepted.

To illustrate this point, even yet today, there are several versions of the definition of the term "curriculum." One authority states that curriculum is . . . "a program composed of all experiences a learner has under the guidance, direction and responsibility of the school (3, p. 338). Another source relates, "To many people curriculum still means the subject matter of courses offered

by a school (3, p. 337). A third reference defines curriculum as "an orderly arrangement of integrated subjects, activities and experiences which students pursue for the attainment of a specific educational goal (5, p. 89). Is it any wonder that teachers are hard pressed to understand what curriculum really means, where it fits into their program and why they are so often faced with that ever haunting question, "What am I or what are we trying to accomplish?"

The supervisor's task in assisting the teacher to clarify the role she/he is to play and how to effectively carry out that role in a teaching/learning environment are apparent. But first the supervisor must have a firm grasp on what comprises the teaching/learning environment, how different forces within that environment interact, and his/her responsibility/s within such an environment. A clear and easily articulated definition of curriculum is but one of the areas of understanding that a supervisor must possess as well as be able to demonstrate a thorough working knowledge of its application.

For the purpose of this discussion curriculum, which is interchangable with course of study, will be defined in accordance with the third example presented earlier: "an orderly arrangement of integrated subjects, activities and experiences which students pursue for the attainment of a specific educational goal." The remainder of the discussion will attempt to actualize or operationalize this definition from the vantage point of a vocational education supervisor.

Basic Principles of Curriculum Development

Once the supervisor has firmly established in his/her mind the definition of curriculum as it applies to vocational education, the next step entails becoming familiar with the framework for sound curriculum design and the application of that framework to a specific educational program and setting. Curriculum theorists agree that there is a logic to curriculum development in that "First we select the objectives, then we plan the learning experiences, then we organize the learning experiences into integrated and sequential units to provide for maximum cumulative effect, and then we evaluate the results to judge the effectiveness of the teaching and organization of the course (4, p. 225).

Taba (4, p. 225) redefined this basic four-step framework for developing curriculum into seven steps:

1. diagnosis of need
2. formulation of objectives
3. selection of content
4. organization of content
5. selection of learning experiences
6. organization of learning experiences and
7. evaluation

During the 1975-76 school year the Ohio Department of Education's Division of Vocational Education endeavored to further elaborate upon a curriculum framework and its application to vocational education across the state. This effort, which was referred to an An Instructional System Design for Vocational

Education, built upon what was already known as sound curriculum planning practice, but then expanded and/or refined certain components or steps to meet specific and unique dimensions of vocational education. The ISD, as it became known, consisted of eight steps:

1. Determine need based upon a current and comprehensive occupational analysis.
2. Develop a course outline embracing the total instructional program based upon the occupational analysis and validated by an occupational craft committee.
3. Define and articulate instructional program objectives in a student performance or behaviorial mode which include broad-based evaluation criteria.
4. Prepare a statement of instructional strategies that sets forth methods for planning, organizing, manipulating and integrating facilities, equipment, instructional aids, materials, time and students within the limits of school policy for the purpose of teaching tasks and related content.
5. Scope and sequence tasks to be taught in terms of depth, breadth and appropriate order.
6. Group and schedule compatible series of tasks and activities in order to optimize the use of educational facilities and equipment as well as assure all students sufficient opportunity to acquire the essential technical and occupational skills through application and practice.

7. Determine the related instructional content, including the basic scientific principles and the technical knowledge required to perform the manipulative tasks of an occupation.
8. Design evaluation strategies for determining the success of the instructional process, including the necessary planning to assure accurate appraisal of learner achievement in relation to behavioral objectives.

It is not the intent of this discussion to provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of the integration and application of the eight steps of the ISD in curriculum design and implementation. (For further elaboration refer to reference number five.) It is the intent of this section, however, to acquaint the reader with a framework for curriculum design and to emphasize that a thorough understanding of the individual components, as well as their integration and application, are imperative if a vocational education supervisor is to provide positive leadership and assistance to teachers in the area of curriculum design and improvement. It is only through such an understanding that the supervisor can assure continuity in the instructional program, compatibility with the educational environment and congruency with the occupational and community expectations.

Affecting Curriculum Development, Improvement and Change Through Leadership

Building upon a solid understanding of curriculum design and

how it is applied, the vocational education supervisor then becomes the catalytic agent for bringing about improved curricula in the educational setting. It is important that the supervisor acknowledge that she/he cannot, nor will be expected to be technically competent in all program areas that may fall under his/her supervisory jurisdiction. The supervisor must be skilled in the curriculum administrative process, however, and excercise a key role as an enabler or facilitator in bringing about planned curriculum improvement.

Initially the supervisor must create a climate that unequivocally establishes curriculum as a high priority area of emphasis in the educational process. This will most assuredly be achieved better through example rather than precept.

As a point of departure each supervisor should have and use an annual plan aimed specifically toward bringing about desired curricular change within a particular time frame. Such a plan could include activities like updating and reviewing occupational analysis as a basis for analyzing and validating instructional program content, scheduling occupational craft committees to review curricular content and organization, scheduling inservice days and/or staff meetings with designated curriculum agenda topics of discussion and/or presentation, and arranging for supervisory visits and individual teacher conferences that focus upon curriculum issues, concerns and/or problems.

Each supervisor must develop his/her style in relation to impacting upon the curriculum. Since it is virtually impossible

for the supervisor to be technically competent in all instructional program areas of assigned responsibility, it is imperative that she/he design and apply an analytical strategy for reviewing curriculum content and facilitating curricular revision and/or change.

One illustration of a strategy for making positive impact on the curriculum process involves a four point plan of action:

1. Establish a professionally respectable standard of expectation in curriculum development to be achieved by all teachers.

In all too many instances, schools and program supervisors have been dissatisfied with their state of the art in curriculum development, and yet they have never really determined where they wanted to be in the process. In other instances, where levels of curriculum development expectations have been determined, such expectations were never systematically shared with teachers, thus the teachers were working from a very limited understanding of what they were supposed to do, for whom and by when.

The establishment of a curriculum standard of expectation, including formating and examples, should involve representation from the teaching ranks and should be presented and thoroughly discussed with all teachers at a professional inservice day or faculty meeting.

2. Project a timeline for completion of certain curriculum development milestones by the teaching staff.

Experience has indicated that "curriculum development" in

its broadest sense is an awesome and overwhelming expectation from the teachers' viewpoint. Experience has also shown, however, that if the curriculum development process is divided into reasonable and manageable components that are cumulative in nature, teachers can and will fulfill the expectations placed upon them.

3. Make readily available to teachers the necessary resources including, technical assistance, references, typing services and time for the development of curriculum documents.

If curriculum development is really a priority area then it should appear as such by having all of the supportive elements required to bring it about. All too often curriculum development demands are imposed upon teachers in the absence of the essential supportive components and consequently the teachers become frustrated and perhaps even embittered regarding the entire curriculum development thrust.

Some of the best and most readily available technical assistance and resources for curriculum development are veteran teaching staff personnel who have demonstrated exemplary efforts in curriculum development and organization. Such individuals should be recognized for their achievements and called upon to assist others in their curriculum development efforts. Various kinds of incentives are available to stimulate and encourage exemplary teachers to assume a supporting role.

4. Develop and employ a set of critical and analytical questions to assess the varying stages at which teachers find themselves in the curriculum development process

which in turn suggest prescriptive measures for bringing the developmental effort up to expectation levels.

Perhaps one of the more serious errors that could be made in a curriculum development process is to make the assumption that all teachers are at the same place in their curriculum development efforts. Experience has revealed that while some teachers are basically at point zero in the development process, others may be well along, and with minor to moderate revision or adaption they can measure up to the standard of expectation level. Failure to recognize such a situation on the part of a supervisor followed by a demand that all teachers start at essentially the same place is not only an inefficient use of staff time but may create a morale problem that could have serious implications. The trick in avoiding this situation is being able to accurately assess where an individual teacher is in relation to what is expected and then prescribing intervening measures to address the areas needing attention. Raising the appropriate questions in the curriculum appraisal process can point up the strengths and/or weaknesses that are prevalent and offer some clues as to what 'next steps' seem apparent. A suggested listing of questions are offered for consideration:

a. Is there a written curriculum document or course of study available?

b. How was the content and organization determined? Was an occupational craft committee involved and are there evidences that its input was taken into account?

c. When was the curriculum last updated and/or modified? Who was involved in the updating and revision process?

d. Are the instructional program objectives stated in a student performance mode and do they include broad based evaluation criteria?

e. Does the curriculum or course of study document articulate an over-all instructional strategy that that sets forth what approach to instruction will be employed, how laboratory learning and skill refinement activities will be scheduled, whether or not early placement will be considered, etc.?

f. Is there evidence that the organization of curriculum content shows a logical and sequential progression and is arranged in such a way that all students are assured an opportunity to acquire all learning experiences under a closely supervised and guided plan?

g. Is the related instructional content organized and presented in such a manner that it supports the laboratory activities and is it relevant to the technical knowledge requirements of the occupation which it supposedly addresses?

h. What is happening to the program completers? Are they being employed in the occupational cluster for which they received training? Are they satisfied with their employment and advancing up the occupational ladder?

Is their employer satisfied with their performance?

Sound and lasting curriculum development is a collaborative effort involving the supervisor and the instructional staff. It's a team effort, but as with all teams that enjoy success with any regularity, one of the players assumes a leadership role, providing the direction and cohesiveness that produces a synchronized and efficient effort. The supervisor's role in curriculum development is that of 'captain of the team' and she/he must provide the leadership and create the climate for the development of quality curricula.

The Role of Human Relations in Curriculum Development

In this writer's opinion, the content of this paper would be less than complete if some mention were not made regarding the importance of human relations in the curriculum development process. Although subtle reference has been given to it as it relates to the definition and role of leadership, it is of significant importance to explicity address in brief terms.

Curriculum development is hard work and is not one of the dimensions of education that is enthusiastically pursued by teachers and, in many instances, supervisory/administrative personnel. Mandating it as a requirement or even as a provision of employment may only bring about minimal results. Good curriculum emanates from good leadership which has sold everyone on the importance of good curriculum to good schools.

For a supervisor to be successful in bringing about desired

curriculum improvement she/he must solicit and gain the endorsement and support of his/her teachers. Teachers are the most important commodity in the curriculum improvement process. To be an effective leader and achieve the desired outcome in the curriculum process, it is extremely important that supervisors recognize the importance of the teacher and accord them their due respect. A sincere and abiding respect for the teachers in terms of specific, day-to-day attitudes and behavior will render valuable pay-offs.

> I have reflected for many years on the subject of leadership, or the qualities that make a man a good leader, and I have concluded that this thing of respect for other men is the first item on the list. If I had to train a man to take my job overnight, I would forget about trying to teach him the details of the . . . business and spend my time telling him how important it is for him to respect the people working with him and for him. Many people aspire to positions of leadership without realizing the real leadership begins with respect for people. It cannot be gained by talent, intelligence, or hard work alone. Without respect for the people one is to lead, it is impossible to be an effective leader.
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> Everyone wants to be chief. Not many people realize that the many who become a great leader and wins the respect and affection of many followers usually has a respect for his followers which is as deep and real as their respect for him.
>
> Leadership is not something that can be conferred or granted. A man is not a leader until his people accept him as their leader. He can be their boss, their master, but he is still not their leader. A man can gain control over people by being arbitrarily placed over them, or by various authoritarian means. But leadership is more than having authority over people, more than doing the technically correct thing - it is being the person whom people want to follow. The world is filled with persons who have become managers of men, but real leaders are difficult to find. Leadership implies getting the job done through people, and that process requires mutual respect, (2, p. 79).

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